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Deputy Cathal Crowe
4 Francis St.
Ennis
Co. Clare

Re: PQ 19880/25 - "To ask the Minister for Health if she will outline the capacity of public orthodontic care in Co. Clare at this time; to confirm if there have been any recent retirements of orthodontists in Co. Clare and how the HSE proposes to replace these retirees; to provide a commentary on current wait times for public orthodontics in Co. Clare; and her plans to address the long waiting lists in Co. Clare".

Dear Deputy Crowe,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in regard to your parliamentary question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Dr. Mullane, Lead Orthodontist, HSE Mid West, confirmed that there has been no Specialist Orthodontist based in Co. Clare since the retirement of Dr. Donal Cahill in July 2023. Dr. Mullane advised that the continuing care patients from Co. Clare area who had been in active treatment prior to the retirement of Dr. Cahill has been assumed by other Specialist Orthodontists within the service.

Dr. Mullane confirmed that patients from Co. Clare continue to be called for orthodontic assessment at the HSE Orthodontic & Restorative Department located at St. Camillus' Hospital, Shelbourne Road, Limerick. Therefore, these patients have not been disadvantaged by the Specialist Orthodontist vacancy in Ennis.

The HSE Orthodontic Service across the Mid-West is currently challenged by reduced clinical staffing levels within the service. The service is making every effort to recruit additional Specialist Orthodontists and an international recruitment campaign is now under consideration. It can be anticipated that once the vacancies within the service have been filled, the waiting time for patients will be reduced significantly.

Dr. Mullane advised that while every effort has been made to fill the existing vacancies within the service, unfortunately, the pool of Specialist Orthodontists is very limited. She also advised that it should be noted that the issue of recruiting and retaining suitably qualified Orthodontists is not unique to the HSE Mid-West area, but is an issue for the HSE Orthodontic Service throughout the country.

However, despite the ongoing challenge of reduced staffing levels within the service, Dr. Mullane wishes to assure you that patients from Co. Clare continue to be called from HSE Orthodontic treatment waiting list in accordance with their waiting list protocol.

I will outline over, details of national orthodontic waiting list initiatives that have been introduced in an effort to reduce the wait times for some patients in Co. Clare who are on the orthodontic treatment waiting list with the HSE Mid West Orthodontic Service:



National Orthodontic Waiting List Initiatives:

- The orthodontic care of some Grade 4 patients from the Clare area has been outsourced to private service providers under the National Orthodontic Treatment Waiting List Initiative. It can be anticipated that, subject to the continuity of funding for this initiative, more Grade 4 patients will be eligible to avail of this initiative going forward.
- A National waiting List Initiative for Grade 5a patients in the 11-14 year old cohort is currently at the procurement stage but there is currently no timeframe for the commencement of this initiative. It can be anticipated that 5a patients from Co. Clare in the appropriate age category will be eligible to avail of treatment under this initiative once it has commenced.
- As with all patients who are on orthodontic treatment waiting lists, patients from the Co. Clare are entitled to receive orthodontic care within Northern Ireland under the Northern Ireland Planned Healthcare Scheme. Under this scheme, the HSE will reimburse orthodontic fees up to a maximum of €2,200 or the cost of treatment abroad, whichever is the lesser. The entire course of treatment must be completed within Northern Ireland and should the patient attend any orthodontic appointment in Ireland, the entire programme of care will be ineligible for reimbursement. Further information in relation to this scheme are available from the National Contract Point via telephone at 056 7784547 or 056 7784546

In response to your request for commentary on the current waiting times for patients to access HSE Orthodontic Services, Dr. Mullane has provided the following information:

- 80% of patients from Co. Clare are seen for orthodontic assessment within 3 months of referral
- 100% of patients from Co. Clare are seen within 6 months of referral.

Dr. Mullane confirmed that the reported statistics outlined above are well in advance of the target set out in the National Operational Plan. She also advised that the average waiting time for HSE Orthodontic treatment is currently over 4 years.

Dr. Mullane wishes to assure you that the service is making every effort to see patients in as timely a manner as is possible within the resources which are currently available to them.

I trust the above information addresses the issues raised in your representation.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Costello
Head of Service
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